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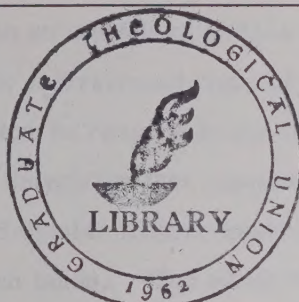
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Walter H. Boyd, Press Officer  
Wm. Drew Dearnaley, Assistant Press Officer

Telephone: (212) 867-8400



79332

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### REACTION SLOW TO NAVAJO PERIL

CHURCH ROCK, N. M. -- More than 100 days after a dam breach spilled huge quantities of radioactive material into the water supply here, the livelihood of 350 Navajo people remains in jeopardy.

The incident began July 16 when the dam at the tailings pond of a United Nuclear Corporation mill near here broke and spilled millions of gallons of tailings - contaminated water into the supply system and grazing area. Public Health Service has barred use of water from the affected area until tests determine the contamination level.

The impacted area is within two miles of the mine and lies east of Gallup. There is some speculation that the contamination may have reached into Arizona through connecting streams. State and federal investigations were launched, but the mine was allowed to resume operation in late October.

Immediately after the disaster, authorities moved to secure the water supply for the area -- some 31,000 gallons a day are needed for the people, livestock and land -- and sought help from governments, private agencies and the United Nuclear company. The Episcopal Church, through the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief and the Navajo Area Mission, supplied \$7,500 in emergency funds for the purchase of storage tanks.

By late October, people were getting water, said Mrs. Helen George, secretary of the Church Rock Chapter House, the local branch of Navajo government. But delivery was erratic because the supply had to be trucked in and the area has already had snowstorms. "The key factor is to get those tanks and establish a regular delivery system," she said.

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That goal hasn't been met yet, partially, she claimed, because the seven tanks promised by United Nuclear were not in place three-and-one-half months after the breach.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that a number of jurisdictions are involved. The mining operation is on state land and the affected wash runs through U.S. trust lands, tribal allotment lands and railroad right-of-way. Mrs. George said government authorities seemed slow to respond to the immediate problem.

Mrs. George was part of a delegation that appeared before the House of Representatives Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs hearings on the range of environmental issues that have surfaced on Indian lands. "The whole Navajo nation was given 15 minutes to speak," she said. "I had about a minute and a half to talk about the Church Rock problem. Their concern is different. You can take all the sediment samples you want, but that doesn't help when people are hurting."

The hurt to the people of the Chapter House is likely to go on -- and grow -- because the incident has locked the livestock into inadequate grazing land for the time being. Reservation authorities are extremely worried about food supplies for the area throughout the winter.

She said the Navajo would be looking into ways to negotiate with the company about reimbursement but the overworked tribal council had not made firm plans yet.

While the July incident remains unresolved, the corporation is reportedly looking at still more sites -- nominally grazing areas -- for mining operations. "Half the uranium mined in the states comes from Navajo lands," Mrs. George noted. "We have to get answers and begin to understand this and we have very few places to turn for answers or help."

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